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CULTIVATING COMMUNITY: TOWARDS A BLACK WOMEN-CENTERED ALTERNATIVE FOOD POLITIC

Sally Rifkin

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Black women are often on the frontline of the battle for food justice in their communities. This research examines the motivations, successes, and challenges of two food justice organizations in St. Louis City and County, both of which were started and are sustained by Black women. A central thread through this project is naturalization—how linking identity with inequality "naturalizes" social difference and limits the potential for radical reimaginings of equality and food justice. This research seeks to "denaturalize" the process of gentrification and the assumptions that food injustice can be solved on the individual level, that food work is women's work, that alternative food is for white people, and that parenting is apolitical. Operating with the understanding that lasting change originates within a community, not from outside, this project reveals how Black women have taken on leadership roles in food sovereignty projects in their own communities. It examines the organizing principles that guide these women, including maternalist politics, womencentered organizing, and the importance of free spaces. This research also discusses the potential for collaboration between people of different identities and between organizations while maintaining the vital importance of Black women. By revealing the historical roots of alternative food in Black communities, this research makes the case for a food justice movement built around survival strategies particular to Black communities. This project argues for a movement that centers the legacies of Black alternative foodways and Black women-centered community organizing as the building blocks for food justice and food sovereignty.